

Pacing with Jack-O-Learning with Dave Camwell

Origins: I taught a class that had many different types of students – weak, lazy, talented, smart, quick, slow, etc...balancing this wide selection of students made pacing difficult. Some students felt class moved too quickly, while others were ready to move on. Accurately gauging where the class *really* was, was difficult.

Further reasoning: Students often do not let the teacher know if they are struggling. Fear of looking slow to their peers or the professor often makes students reluctant to call for help.

Feedback: I received feedback (anecdotal, course evaluations) that said I moved too fast. However, I did not have anyone actually ever tell me this before evaluations, so my balancing act dealing with the wide range of students took longer to change that it could have if I had been able to have more feedback.

Method: As a result, I used a non-threatening tool at the end of each class to gauge student feelings towards the pacing of the class. This tool was "Jack", an orange, plastic jack-o-lantern from a previous Halloween. It was the perfect size, and made the evaluations more fun. I handed out blank slips of paper (see back side) that asked for quick and anonymous feedback at the end of each class. Surprisingly, there were not very many conflicting results. (I had expected the slower students to say "*class is moving too quickly*" and the faster students to check the opposite box.) However, I found that by slowing down to approximately 75% of my previous pace, most students were happy.

Result: My last semester of teaching this course had by far the most positive course evaluations and was popular with the class.

Morale of the story: Don't wait until the end of the semester for feedback! Also, having a "fun" way of doing quick evaluations for the students ("Don't forget to fill up Jack on your way out".) makes them feel invested in the course.